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ABSTRACT

State and local education systems must abandon the century-old model of the principal as a middle manager directly responsible for every aspect of school operations and performance. Intense job stress, excessive time requirements, difficulty satisfying parents and community, social problems that make it difficult to focus on instructional issues, and low pay do not have to be the norm. Instead, new arrangements of managing building operations must be tried, such as through outsourcing and team leadership strategies. New models of the principalship must revolve around leadership for learning. Principals should be given the tools and freedom to do their job well, and rewards for high-grade performance. Effective strategies for ensuring quality and results should be explored, chiefly through unprecedented efforts in principal assessment, accountability, and data collection. Only by addressing these issues can public education systems ensure that principals have the instructional, community, and visionary leadership necessary to achieve significant improvements in student learning. There is a need for data, information, and research. Resources for support, technical assistance, and guidance for state and local efforts are also necessary. Recruitment, race and gender gaps, principal-preparation programs, professional standards, and retirement systems that do not cross state lines are problems that must be addressed. (Contains 12 references.) (RKJ)

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Leadership for Student Learning:

Reinventing the Principalship

School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative
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October 2000

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ABOUT IEL

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) — a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based in Washington, D.C. — helps individuals and institutions work together across boundaries to achieve better outcomes for children and youth. IEL's work is focused through five program areas: developing and supporting leaders; strengthening school-family-community connections; improving the policy, program and practice systems that serve children and youth; governing; and improving preparation for work. In conducting its work, IEL employs a variety of strategies including providing technical assistance; hosting conferences and workshops; conducting research and disseminating reports; and developing and supporting networks, alliances and coalitions. At the heart of IEL's effectiveness is its unique ability to bring people together at the local, state and federal levels to find solutions across policy and program boundaries.

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School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative
Institute for Educational Leadership

THE INITIATIVE

IEL's ***School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative*** is raising public awareness about the critical problems facing education leadership. The initiative is engaging partners from education, government, business, civic groups and other organizations tackling leadership issues in various realms of the public education system and seeking to spark action among the increasingly diverse participants in the effort to strengthen the nation's schools. Much of the work is being done by four task forces focusing on leadership at the state, district, principal and teacher levels.

The task forces met during spring and summer 2000. Research findings, theories about educational change and experiences in the field were discussed and debated. Task force members did not always agree on the size, shape or depth of the problems — or what the solutions should be. Clearly, issues of school leadership are complicated, and no one-size-fits-all approach is likely to work in every school, district or state.

This report by IEL's Task Force on Principal Leadership illuminates why principal leadership matters, how specific problems threaten principal leadership and how leaders can address the principalship crisis.

TASK FORCE ON THE PRINCIPALSHIP

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Reinventing the Principalship

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Preface

Schools nationwide are grappling with serious problems ranging from random outbreaks of violence and crumbling facilities to staff shortfalls and chronically low academic expectations for students. But many people believe that a scarcity of capable education leaders ranks among the most severe of the problems. Without strong leaders, schools have little chance of meeting any other challenge.

This interim report of the Institute for Educational Leadership's Task Force on the Principalship describes one aspect of this crisis — the rapidly growing shortage of qualified, high-quality principals — by documenting the urgency of the problem, detailing many promising solutions, and providing information and resources to help you take action in your community. The examples presented here are useful models available for improving school leadership, and they represent ways that task force members believe communities might effectively address the evolving needs of their education systems.

Schools are changing. They are transforming in response to various pressures, including parent complaints about the quality of education, labor market demands for increasingly skilled workers, rapid advances in technology, and the growing popularity of public school alternatives such as charter schools and advocacy for vouchers for private education. No one can say for certain how the schools of the new century will differ from those of the past century — but there can be little doubt that these schools will require different forms of leadership.

Whatever their disagreements (and there were many), the members of the task force agreed broadly on two things: First, the top priority of the principalship must be leadership for learning. Second, the principalship as it currently is constructed — a middle management position overloaded with responsibilities for basic building operations — fails to meet this fundamental priority, instead allowing schools to drift without any clear vision of leadership for learning or providing principals with the skills needed to meet the challenge.

Task force members agreed that school systems must "reinvent the principalship" to meet the needs of schools in the 21st century.

This report is designed to synthesize principalship issues, serve as a call to action, and provide assistance for policymakers and leaders in states and communities who will take on this complex challenge.

All quotations highlighted in this report are taken from the record of participants in the meeting of the Task Force on the Principalship in April 2000.

The Rules Have Changed

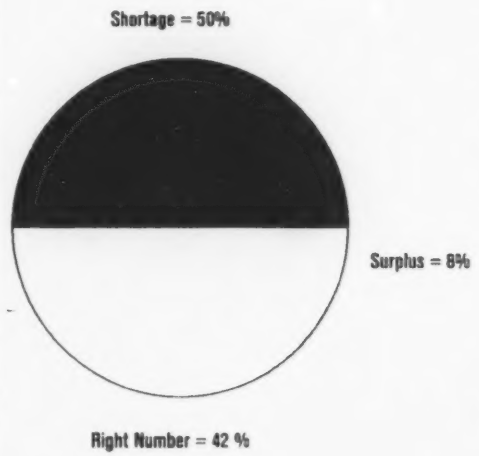
Being an effective building manager used to be good enough. For the past century, principals mostly were expected to comply with district-level edicts, address personnel issues, order supplies, balance program budgets, keep hallways and playgrounds safe, put out fires that threatened tranquil public relations, and make sure that busing and meal services were operating smoothly.

And principals still need to do all those things.

But now they must do more. As studies show the crucial role that principals can play in improving teaching and learning, it is clear that principals today also must serve as ***leaders for student learning***. They must know academic content and pedagogical techniques. They must work with teachers to strengthen skills. They must collect, analyze and use data in ways that fuel excellence. They must rally students, teachers, parents, local health and social service agencies, youth development groups, local businesses, and other community residents and partners around the common goal of raising student performance. And they must have the leadership skills and knowledge to exercise the autonomy and authority to pursue these strategies.

"Learning doesn't happen without leadership."

They must do all of these things, but too often, they do not. Even as communities shine a public spotlight on principals when their schools' test scores are released and prescribe stiff penalties for many when their schools perform below expectations, current principals find very little in their professional preparation or ongoing professional development to equip them for this



Shortage of Qualified Principal Candidates

Superintendents who had filled at least one principal position in the past year were asked if there was a surplus, shortage or the right number of qualified candidates for the principal positions they needed to fill.

Source: *Is There a Shortage of Qualified Candidates for Openings in the Principalship: An Exploratory Study*, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, Educational Research Service, 1998.

new role. Nor are they supported in this leadership role by their school districts, which, for decades, have expected principals to do little more than follow orders, oversee school staff and contain conflict. So instead, principals mainly stick with what they know, straining to juggle the multiplying demands of running a school in an era of rising expectations, complex student needs, enhanced accountability, expanding diversity, record enrollments and staff shortfalls.

In short, the demands placed on principals have changed, but the profession has not changed to meet those demands — and the tension is starting to show. Principals increasingly say the job is simply not "doable." They are retiring younger and younger. At the same time, school districts report a shortage of qualified candidates for the job. The need for school administrators will increase by 10 to 20 percent in the next five years, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. What those statistics do not illuminate is how few of the candidates facing the challenge will be able to lead the necessary improvements in their schools unless changes are made.

Of course, many of the nation's 93,200 principals are dedicated, persistent, inspiring and effective school leaders. Yet many are not. The reality is that the future of the principalship is in question as legislators, employers, parents and others call for higher academic standards and greater accountability for academic success. The conflict between the rapidly expanding job demands and a shrinking pool of qualified candidates portends a catastrophe.

There is no alternative. Communities around the country must "reinvent the principalship" to enable principals to meet the challenges of the 21st century, and to guarantee the leaders for student learning that communities need to guide their schools and children to success.

Tomorrow's Principal

Schools are changing dramatically. Principals in the coming decades will lead schools that are far different than those of today. Students will be more numerous and more diverse than ever, and they will continue to bring many of society's problems to the schoolhouse door. Qualified teachers will be harder to find. Technology will play an ever-increasing role in education. Safety likely will remain a top concern. Increasingly, schools will be expected to be centers of community. Many principals will lead schools in public education systems exploring innovations such as charter schools and tuition vouchers. And perhaps most importantly, academic achievement will be the priority for professional accountability. In other words, principals will be expected to lead in an atmosphere of constant, volatile change.

The principal of today, on the other hand, typically is a white male about 50 years old. He works at least 10 hours a day. He has been a principal since before 1990. In the intervening decade, he has received little training or support to help him deal with the emerging challenges of school-wide leadership for student learning.

Despite the yawning chasm between where principals are and where they need to be, the nation can prepare principals for tomorrow's challenges. Communities have little choice. The schools of the 21st century will require a new kind of principal, one whose role will be defined in terms of:

- **instructional leadership** that focuses on strengthening teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decisionmaking and accountability;
- **community leadership** manifested in a big-picture awareness of the school's role in society; shared leadership among educators, community partners and residents; close relations with parents and others; and advocacy for school capacity building and resources; and
- **visionary leadership** that demonstrates energy, commitment, entrepreneurial spirit, values and conviction that all children will learn at high levels, as well as inspiring others with this vision both inside and outside the school building.

All three are important. But in a crucial sense, leadership for student learning is the priority that connects and encompasses all three major roles. The bottom line of schooling, after all, is student learning. Everything principals do — establishing a vision, setting goals, managing staff, rallying the community, creating effective learning environments, building support systems for students, guiding instruction and so on — must be in service of student learning.

New Leadership Models

Accomplishing all this is a lot to expect of any one person. Principals have limited time, and they have different talents and interests. Some principals, for example, might want to be directly involved in providing instructional leadership, where others might want that to be the role of an especially skilled administrator or master teacher, allowing the principal to concentrate on parent involvement. While the principal must provide the leadership essential for student learning, the roles of the principal and of other school staff can be restructured to reinforce that leadership and manage the implementation of the school program effectively. Responsibilities for getting the work done can be distributed among a leadership team or given to others as specific functions.

A leadership team might be made up of a principal, a chief academic officer, a master teacher, a community services coordinator, a management services provider, a school governance council or

any combination of these. If individual functions are assigned, a lead teacher might coordinate curriculum development. A chief academic officer might guide instruction. An assessment specialist might supervise schoolwide testing and routine classroom evaluation. Another school employee might promote parent involvement and public engagement. A community services coordinator from a community-based organization might organize supports and opportunities for students and families. An outside contractor might oversee management or services such as food, transportation or maintenance. Some schools have found such approaches for distributing discrete leadership roles among individuals other than the principal highly effective.

Another option is to explore local school governance structures that require principals to share decisionmaking with teachers, parents and others. This approach is not new. In the past two decades, Boston has formed "school site councils," Chicago "local school councils" and Dade County, Fla., "school-based management cadres." Again, some schools have found such structures to be effective ways of sharing leadership.

But school councils and other site-based management entities have had mixed results in improving student learning, possibly because these leadership teams often focus on matters that have little to do with achievement, because teachers and others have too little time to contribute, or because these teams often end up deferring to the authority of the principal regardless of shared powers and responsibilities. In short, there is no single model of distributed leadership that is sure to work for every school.

No matter what approach a school takes, the role of the principal is central. However leadership is designed, divided or structured at the school level, ***principal leadership*** must be a matter of effectively leading a community of teachers, learners and other school community members.

Coming Up Short

In the next 10 years, 2.2 million new teachers will be needed, more students will be added to the nation's school systems and additional administrative positions will be created as the systems grow. Is the United States prepared to meet the rising demand for principals who will have to provide a level of leadership for student learning greater than ever before?

No. As schools require a new breed of principal, communities face a shortage of candidates who even measure up to traditional criteria for the job. In a 1998 survey of 403 school district superintendents, ***half reported a shortage of qualified candidates*** for principal vacancies. The study cites a wave of principal retirements as the major cause for the shortage, a phenomenon that is expected to worsen by 2005. Because of a steady rise in the average age of principals in recent years, more than 37 percent were over age 50 by the 1993–94 school year, according to the study based on the most recently available federal survey data.

These shortages are expected to hit some regions harder than others. For example, a 1999 University of Minnesota study estimated that, by 2010, about 75 percent of Minnesota principals will be lost through retirement or attrition, even as school enrollments are expected to grow by 10 to 20 percent. Yet the problem in Minnesota and elsewhere is not a shortage of credentialed job candidates. For every administrator leading a school in Minnesota, there are three additional licensed administrators who do not hold school leadership positions. Still, 86 percent of Minnesota superintendents reported in 1998 that filling principal positions was "difficult" or "very difficult."

Too few credentialed people are prepared adequately for the job. And too few qualified educators want to be principals. Why? Anecdotally, many reasons are offered: Too little pay. Eighty-hour workweeks. Overbearing district leadership. Uneven quality of teachers. Demanding parents. The profes-

sion's low status and poor image. Responsibility for everything from raising student achievement to addressing "all the problems of society" to keeping buses on time. Insufficient resources for rising expectations. New pressures principals are poorly prepared to manage. Rising job stress.

"Teaching did not prepare me for being a principal; it's more like being the mayor of a small town."

The little research on the topic supports these impressions. When asked what discourages job applicants in a 1998 exploratory study, 60 percent of surveyed superintendents who had filled at least one principal position in the past year and reported a shortage of qualified candidates said that ***compensation was too low*** considering the responsibilities of the principal's job. Smaller shares of respondents also identified other problems, including ***intense job stress, excessive time requirements, difficulty of satisfying parents and community members, and social problems that make it hard to focus on instructional issues.***

Especially at a time when school districts are offering unprecedented compensation packages for teachers and the sky-high economy is presenting tempting opportunities for potential leaders outside public education, it is not hard to understand why the principalship is failing to attract qualified candidates to its ranks.

Seizing the Opportunities

The disturbing portrait that emerges from the stories and statistics related here is one of a profession in crisis, ill-equipped to meet the rising demands of education reform or attract promising candidates to its dwindling ranks. Where communities look for principals to serve as strong leaders for student learning, they see a growing vacuum. At risk is nothing less than the success of U.S. schools.

The absence of strong leadership at the school level could undermine needed education reforms. The poor performance of many U.S. students on measures such as the Third International Mathematics and Science Study — and the persistently poor performance among the growing numbers of low-income and minority children compared to their counterparts throughout America — raise serious concerns about U.S. public schools' ability to educate their students and about the nation's ability to sustain its current economic advantage.

Principals can make a difference. These school leaders "exercise a measurable, though indirect, effect on school effectiveness and student achievement," according to *Exploring the Principal's Contribution to School Effectiveness: 1980–1995*, a recent report by Philip Hallinger and Ronald Heck synthesizing 15 years of research on how principals impact their schools. Principals, the study shows, influence school performance by shaping school goals, direction, structure, and organizational and social networks. Further, successful principal leadership guides the school policies, procedures and practices that contribute directly to student learning.

The Educational Research Service concludes in its recent study on principals, "Researchers, policy makers, and educational practitioners agree: ***good school principals are the keystone of good schools.*** Without the principal's leadership, efforts to raise student achievement cannot succeed."

Yet the power of the principalship represents an opportunity for meaningful improvement in education. There are steps communities can take — indeed, steps they must take — to reverse this growing education crisis.

What Discourages Applicants for the Principalship?

Prior to the Principals' Leadership Summit held in Washington, D.C., in July 2000, organizers asked conference participants: "What are the major challenges that discourage a person from pursuing the principalship as a career goal?"

Ninety principals from a diverse collection of school districts, reflecting strong agreement within the field, identified five reasons why relatively few people are seeking to become principals:

- the changing demands of the job, including increased accountability, responsibility for raising students to high standards without adequate support, legal and special education issues, etc.;
- salary;
- time;
- lack of parent and community support and negativity of the media and the public toward schools; and
- lack of respect.

Respondents' open-ended remarks are revealing. A middle school principal, for example, complained of unreasonable accountability demands: "You are responsible for everything that happens in your building, yet in many cases, even in those buildings that have site-based management, you don't control the factors that can impact your school." The factors identified by that principal as beyond his control included students' home environments, families' socioeconomic status and families' mobility.

An elementary school principal noted, "People look at the hours principals devote to the job, the demands made by unreasonable parents, the liability for students and staff, the legal issues, the increasing needs of students that the school is expected to meet (as reasons not to become principals). Then they look at the salary, and the fact that in many districts, principals' efforts are not acknowledged and appreciated."

One high school principal remarked, "The job requires confidence and moral courage. Not everyone has that."

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Source: Kennedy, Carole, editor. (2000) *Summary of Responses to NAESP/NASSP/NMSA Survey Questions, Principals' Leadership Summit*, July 24-26, 2000, Washington, D.C. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the Rainwater Foundation with assistance from the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Middle School Association.

Reinventing the Principalship

Communities must reinvent the principalship, first and foremost, in terms of leadership for student learning. All other traditional functions of the principal, whether carried out by the principal or by other members of a school management team, must be filtered through the lens of leadership for student learning.

To do this, IEL's Task Force on the Principalship recommends addressing three critical challenges:

1. **Fill the pipeline with effective school leaders.** Action options include buttressing recruitment and retention, improving preparation and raising entry and exit standards of college preparation programs, and exploring alternate pathways to the principalship for capable leaders.

2. **Support the profession.** Action options include emphasizing leadership for student learning in preparation and professional development, improving ongoing training, boosting pay, and promoting shared goals and efforts among the organizations concerned with principal leadership.

3. **Guarantee quality and results.** Action options include evaluating principals more effectively and more frequently, finding fair ways to hold principals accountable for their role in student learning, and developing stronger systems for gathering the data needed to inform principal leadership.

The central priority of strengthening student learning, shared widely by public school systems nationwide, provides the guiding principle for refocusing the preparation, entry standards, recruitment, professional development, assessment and accountability of principals. Many communities already are finding effective ways to introduce accountability, collect useful data and strengthen training for principals. Some of those efforts are highlighted here. Because every community is unique, no one-size-fits-all model is likely to work for every school system, but core elements of these examples can be adapted for your community's use. You are urged to use these resources and tools as a starting place in your community's quest for stronger leadership for student learning. The next section of this report explores the major challenges for reinventing the principalship and offers action strategies designed to help you get started.

Strategies for Reinvention

1. FILL THE PIPELINE WITH EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERS

The current shortage of qualified candidates for principal positions — which is only expected to worsen in the coming decade — has focused the education community's attention on the "pipeline" aspect of the problem. Where will communities find the effective leaders for student learning needed for tomorrow's schools?

Consider the Evidence

• **Recruitment** is uneven, spotty and poorly organized in many places. Principal candidates are largely self-selected. In many districts, superintendents do not play a major role in recruitment and, when they do, tend to recruit principals to serve in a limited fashion as managers. Human resource development and personnel functions in too many school districts are weak. Current principals rarely identify and groom successors. The most obvious choices — assistant principals and teachers — sometimes receive little or no experience or preparation to help them become school leaders. In a 1998 survey, only 27 percent of school districts reported having a program to recruit or prepare aspiring principals.

• **Race and gender gaps** among principals — although narrowing — continue to indicate the underrepresentation of women and minorities in the profession. Thirty-five percent of districts surveyed in 1998 reported that raising the number of minorities in management positions was an issue in the district, and 17 percent said that the same was true for women, according to the Educational Research Service. From 1987–88 to 1993–94 (the most recent period for which federal survey data are available), the percentage of female principals in public schools increased from 24.6 to 34.5 percent, while the share of minority principals also rose, though less sharply, from 13 to 16 percent. Furthermore, these national statistics mask other patterns, such as the concentration of female principalships at the elementary (rather than middle or high school) level and of minority principalships in urban (rather than suburban or rural) schools. Particularly in an era of sharply increasing minority student enrollments, such figures are cause for concern.

• **Traditional principal preparation** programs offered by colleges and universities are disconnected from the daily realities and needs of schools. Principal training seldom is anchored in hands-on leadership experience in real schools, where principals-in-training might learn valuable lessons in shaping instructional practice, sharing and delegating authority, nurturing leadership ability among school faculty and staff, and exercising community and visionary leadership.

• **Standards for those seeking to enter the profession** generally are uneven and inconsistent. (There are exceptions, such as the standards developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, but these are far from being universally adopted or implemented.) As long as licensure standards are not very rigorous, there is little chance of principal preparation improving greatly.

• **Retirement systems** put unnecessary curbs on principals' options for relocating by limiting the "portability" of their professional skills and credentials. At a time when shortages of qualified school leaders vary from place to place, states and communities do not have retirement systems that enable effective principals to move freely without sacrificing important benefits. As long as school systems are, in effect, restricted to hiring from among the principals already working within the state, their candidate pool will be unnecessarily limited. Moreover, while retention represents an enticing

option for hanging onto seasoned leaders — and while retooled retention policies might entice veteran principals to stay in school systems longer — these are not always the people with the up-to-date skills needed to provide leadership for student learning.

• **Nontraditional candidates for the principalship** who come from other disciplines and training, including former business people and military officials, present another option for the pipeline. But if teaching experience is a requirement, then nontraditional candidates must receive special training and support to become ready to take on a role of leadership for student learning.

Take Action

The traditional pipeline for producing principals does not guarantee high-quality leaders. To ensure that it does, communities should investigate a variety of approaches:

Increase dramatically investments in recruitment and retention efforts that focus on leadership for student learning. Because schools require leaders who can do more than serve as middle managers, local leaders must explore strategies explicitly designed to hire and retain effective leaders for student learning. No doubt, there will be costs associated with "raising the bar" for principals. But until public officials take this first crucial step, the nation's ability to significantly improve schools will be in question.

Target recruitment and retention efforts to better reflect the demographics of student populations and provide the leadership role models children deserve. In particular, recruiting women and minorities must become a higher priority, especially in areas and schools where the need is greatest.

Revamp principal preparation programs to focus on instructional, community and visionary leadership roles in improving student learning in real schools. Colleges, universities and principal academies should revise standards for those applying to and graduating from principal training programs, making clear that the purpose of these programs is to generate strong leaders for student learning. Principals must have preparation that helps them gain greater knowledge of a variety of leadership skills and styles, as well as knowledge about the role of the school in a community, how communities work and how principals can work effectively with community partners. Closer partnerships between principal training programs and local school systems also are needed to link training with hands-on experience in leadership for student learning and collaborations with effective principals. Overwhelming majorities of elementary school principals say the factors that add the greatest value to their success are on-the-job experience as principal (97 percent) and experience as a teacher (89 percent), according to a 1998 study by the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

Develop higher standards for principals and more rigorous means of credentialing principals. Training programs must reconfigure their work around the redefined role of the principal outlined in this report. Professional standards boards and state departments of education must develop and implement a set of standards that reflect the raised expectations for school leaders and that acknowledge the centrality of leadership for student learning in the role of the principal. The new national Standards for School Leaders developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium provide a powerful framework for undertaking such efforts. Greater rigor and higher standards should also be required for the accreditation of principal training programs, which will be responsible for delivering the upgraded and reconfigured training for the principalship.

Retool retirement and retention programs to increase principals' freedom to move across state boundaries without sacrificing important benefits and to encourage effective principals to remain on the job. Placing arbitrary limits on principals' relocating options is not an effective strategy for

Promising Practices: Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium

Because the U.S. Constitution leaves the primary responsibility for public education to the states, many people look to state governments to lead the way in school reform. Many states, in fact, have launched pioneering efforts to improve schools by strengthening leadership, some of which are described in this report. Perhaps the single-most influential initiative in this area, however, is one that transcends state boundaries: the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC).

Organized by the Council of Chief State School Officers in partnership with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, ISLLC has brought together dozens of states and education associations to voluntarily develop model standards, assessments and licensing procedures for school leaders. ISLLC remains focused on the central mission of helping create leaders for student learning by grounding criteria and standards for school leaders' professional practice in a deep knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning.

The six ISLLC Standards for School Leaders are:

"A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by 1) facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community; 2) advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth; 3) ensuring management of the organization, operations and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; 4) collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources; 5) acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner; and 6) understanding, responding to and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context."

ISLLC principles, standards and indicators have been published and distributed during the past few years, with funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Danforth Foundation and member states. Additionally, five states and the District of Columbia have contracted with a national test-maker to develop assessments for the licensing of beginning principals. Since its creation in 1998, the School Leaders Licensure Assessment has been adopted by eight states.

In May 2000, ISLLC took its work a step further. In addition to raising the bar for school leaders through model standards and assessments, ISLLC released a report that helps link the consortium's Standards for School Leaders, now used in more than 30 states, to professional development for school administrators. Standards Based Professional Development for School Leaders recommends strategies, provides models and promotes collaboration in the professional development process.

For more information, contact Amy Mast, Senior Project Associate, Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, Council of Chief State School Officers, One Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001-1431, (202) 326-8692, amym@ccsso.org, www.ccsso.org.

Source: Council of Chief State School Officers Web site (www.ccsso.org), September 2000.

promoting high-quality leadership. On the contrary, by enhancing portability, state public education systems can enrich their own pool of potential candidates. Likewise, school systems are not well served by retention policies that indiscriminately encourage all retirement-age principals to stay on the job, regardless of whether they have the professional knowledge and skills needed to provide strong leadership for student learning. School districts should craft policies that make retention hinge on principal evaluations based, at least in part, on achieving results in student learning.

Explore nontraditional sources, within and beyond the existing pipeline, for principal candidates. Nearly all states require at least three years of teaching experience, but questions increasingly are raised about whether school leaders need such levels of teaching experience to create environments where effective teaching and learning can take place. States must develop better strategies to identify, nurture and promote strong principal candidates from a wider range of backgrounds, whether by developing more appropriate requirements for candidates or extending searches to include alternative candidates such as former business, military and nonprofit leaders.

2. SUPPORT THE PROFESSION

Without a solid support system, the best-laid plans for strengthening the principalship are jeopardized. To sustain a new breed of leaders for student learning, school systems must take a fresh approach to professional development, mentoring, coaching and peer support networks — and principal compensation.

Consider the Evidence

• **Professional development** in general is weak, seldom focused on instructional issues and poorly connected to relevant school context. In a recent survey of K–8 principals, for instance, 97.2 percent rated on-the-job experience as a principal as having the most value to their success as principals. The results were mixed for graduate education and a variety of professional development programs. In addition, principals generally have few opportunities for networking or coaching, which would provide a vehicle for peer support, sharing information and learning best practices. Without such formal and informal vehicles for interacting with professional peers, principals find themselves "alone in the crowd" at their own schools.

• **Better pay and recognition** would tackle the number-one obstacle to hiring qualified principals, who are expected to deal with job stress, excessive time demands and a host of other problems. At the same time, principals often are treated not as leaders for academic success, but as scapegoats and apologists for schools' shortcomings. Too often, instead of being given the decisionmaking freedom and power they need to do what is expected of them, principals are boxed into roles of compliance and middle management. Unless principals are valued adequately for their rapidly expanding roles, communities will be unable to recruit and retain the leaders they need. Why should educators choose to become principals when, as Mildred Collins Blackman of the Harvard University Principals' Center points out, senior teachers often earn more on an hourly basis than their principals?

• **The job simply is not "doable,"** according to many principals today. In addition to heeding the directives of state and district superiors, managing high-turnover staffs, and responding to parent and community concerns, principals now are expected to operate educational programs that guarantee high achievement for all students. Add to these challenges the lethal mix of long hours, meager pay, little respect, and new accountability measures that often seem harsh and unfair. Caught among these competing priorities and pressures, principals increasingly see their charge as an impossible proposition.

• **Autonomy and authority,** granted to very few principals, are needed to exert powerful leadership for student learning. Bound tightly by district and state regulations and policies, school admin-

istrators are accountable not only for ensuring that their schools meet prescribed academic goals, but also for managing their schools and staffs in the ways deemed acceptable by their governing entities. In brief, the principalship generally is constructed as a position not so much for leadership — much less leadership for student learning — as for middle management.

Take Action

Public commitments to reinvent the profession of school principal are commendable, but to "walk the walk" communities must support principals in the new roles carved out for them. Communities must explore these promising strategies:

Provide powerful, ongoing professional development focusing on effective strategies for improving student learning. Systemic efforts might include new programs, activities or schedules that support principal networking, mentoring and coaching at the school and district levels. Boston Public School principals, for example, evaluate each other's schools using an established protocol for observing instruction. Like these school administrators, the principals of tomorrow's schools must be more than building managers — they must have the training, tools and skills for leadership for student learning.

Provide principal salaries and benefits sufficient to attract and retain the best candidates for the job. With 60 percent of school districts identifying insufficient compensation compared to job responsibilities as the main barrier to filling principal positions, education leaders from the statehouse to the local school board no longer can afford to skimp on compensation for principals, the keystone of the high performance school.

Alleviate the unprecedented, unnecessary and unproductive stresses placed on today's principal by reconfiguring and supporting the primary role of the principal as leader for student learning. School systems should recognize that one person cannot provide effective leadership for student learning while tending to the thousand tasks traditionally heaped on principals. Instead, school systems must recognize the need to provide principals with the resources and flexibility to delegate specific responsibilities, distribute leadership or head up school leadership teams as needed. School district and community support is vital to the new leadership role of the principal.

Enhance principal autonomy and authority for building-level decisionmaking. School leaders should remain accountable for helping their schools meet district and state goals, but they must have greater flexibility in crafting creative strategies to meet those goals — possibly the most important form of support necessary to help them be leaders for student learning.

3. GUARANTEE QUALITY AND RESULTS

For many decades, states and local districts have charged principals to run schools virtually without the benefit — to principals or to the communities they serve — of assessment and accountability. States and school districts rarely collect information on administrators, individually or collectively, that could be used to help them perform better. And policymakers have only just begun to hold principals responsible for enhancing student learning.

Consider the Evidence

• **Principal evaluation,** in most cases, is infrequent, superficial and not geared to promote professional growth. Many principals go years without any evaluation whatsoever. When they are assessed, evaluations seldom incorporate professional accountability measures to spur improvement. Finally, the feedback principals receive rarely provides the opportunities they need to reflect substantively on strengths, weaknesses and ways to support student learning.

Promising Practices: Principals' Executive Program

One state getting serious about supporting the principal profession is North Carolina. The Principals' Executive Program (PEP) of the University of North Carolina's Center for School Leadership Development provides a unique array of professional development supports for principals, assistant principals and other leadership personnel from all grade levels in the state's public schools.

Created in 1984 by the North Carolina General Assembly with the ultimate aim of improving student performance, PEP has patterned its professional development program after Harvard University's renowned leadership training program for business executives.

PEP offers training in two forms: "residential" and "topical." Residential programs at the Chapel Hill campus, which provide in-depth training on numerous school issues, span from three to 20 days. Topical programs are one- to three-day sessions focusing on particular topics.

PEP also provides free telephone consultations on school law issues for all North Carolina public school administrators and maintains a library of books, videotapes and audio cassettes on a wide range of education leadership topics. The program recently published *Education Law in North Carolina*, a 32-chapter compendium that translates complex legal issues confronting schools into plain English.

Finally, the program is involved in a handful of research initiatives aiming to deepen understanding about what it takes to lead schools to success. PEP recently studied five North Carolina "turn-around" schools — where physical and demographic characteristics resembled those of traditionally low-performing schools but where students achieved at high levels — to develop case studies that administrators can draw upon in their work. Other research efforts, conducted in partnership with groups such as the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement and the Center for School Leadership's Lighthouse Project, seek to build knowledge of leadership topics such as school-home-community connections, serving at-risk students and professional evaluations.

For more information, contact Ken Jenkins, Director, Principals' Executive Program, Center for School Leadership Development, University of North Carolina, CB 3335, D-3 Carr Mill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3335, (919) 962-3360, jenkinsk@ga.unc.edu, www.ga.unc.edu/pep.

Source: Principals' Executive Program Web site (www.ga.unc.edu/pep), September 2000.

• **Principal accountability,** in the past, has not focused much on the principal's role in improving teaching and learning. Instead, it has revolved around the principal's ability as a middle manager to satisfy the requirements of those below (mainly teachers), those above (the superintendent and school board) and those largely outside the school system (the community). A newer form of principal accountability focuses intensely on leadership for student learning — a promising advance, provided that accountability systems are fair as well as rigorous. But some new formulations of principal accountability fall short of fairness, sometimes focusing too narrowly on student scores on a single standardized test and at other times focusing on factors (such as attendance rates) over which principals may have little influence.

• **Lack of adequate data and knowledge** on the subject is one of the overarching challenges of the principalship crisis. Policymakers and community leaders are largely uninformed and ill-equipped to answer basic questions about the size, nature and seriousness of the crisis. Better data collection processes and a way to aggregate data across states are needed. Further, there is a need for additional information on alternate ways of organizing and managing schools and the new lessons learned from these alternate forms. Studies have found mixed results among the local school councils and site-based management practices with which many schools have experimented. Researchers have not significantly investigated or elucidated the strengths of other models of distributive leadership that hold promise, such as delegating responsibility for key functions among school staff or contracting out school services not directly related to the core mission of education. The need to generate more and better data on these issues cannot be overemphasized.

Take Action

From politicians to parents, Americans are asserting their right to hold school administrators responsible for student success. To make good on the promise of strengthening and sustaining principal leadership, communities must explore some key options:

Provide frequent, meaningful principal assessments that are designed to generate information for professional growth and school improvement. Assessment of principals should examine leadership for student learning through multiple measures, include a range of indicators of progress in key areas, and provide recommendations for professional growth and improvement. One promising strategy is to examine evidence of leadership for student learning through the lenses of the three types of principal leadership described in this report: instructional, community and visionary.

Establish rigorous and fair systems of accountability for principals. Local education officials, policymakers and the public must have means to hold principals accountable for results. To ensure that principals can deliver those results, public education systems, principals and principals' organizations also must explore ways to use accountability as a tool for improvement. While principals might not always be able to control the ultimate outcome of the education process — that is, they might not be able to guarantee that students learn, possibly owing to factors beyond their control — they must be held accountable for creating the conditions necessary for effective teaching and learning. To reinvent the principalship, school systems must provide principals with fair and meaningful incentives for success, consequences for low performance and assistance for improvement.

Increase data and information collection on the supply, effectiveness and changing roles of principals. Without sound, timely data, policymakers and public education officials cannot make responsible decisions. Colleges, universities, principal academies and other organizations must support this effort to deepen existing knowledge of what attracts people to the principalship, what counts (money? autonomy? prestige?) and what the barriers to progress are. In addition, distributive leadership and alternate governance structures are topics worthy of investigation. Schools in which principals are sharing and distributing leadership responsibilities among staff and outside partners must be examined to determine whether such strategies work, how they work and how well they might work for other schools.

Promising Practices: Peer Group Evaluation Process

At the Chula Vista Elementary School District near San Diego, principals do not wait until they are evaluated by their superintendent to find out how they are doing. They take that aspect of professional leadership into their own hands — by evaluating each other.

With the encouragement, guidance and support of Superintendent Libia Gil, the district's 35 principals developed and implemented the Peer Group Evaluation Process in 1994 as a way of ensuring that evaluation serves its core purpose: promoting professional growth.

Principal peer groups, ranging in size from four to seven members, meet once a month during the school year. Following an initial conference with the superintendent, each principal participates in group goal-setting sessions. The groups select individuals to be evaluated on a two-year rotation cycle (except for new principals, who are on an annual evaluation schedule during the required three-year probationary period).

Peer groups use classroom observations, analysis of student work, and interviews with staff and parents in the evaluation process. Longitudinal data on student achievement, attendance rates and other school data are weighed. Regular surveys of parents, community members, school staff and students help determine necessary improvement actions.

Additionally, the district's Principal Standards help principals diagnose weaknesses and develop strengths in areas such as building leadership capacity, shared decisionmaking, staff supervision, instruction, continuous improvement, school operations and culture, communication, parent involvement, safety, conflict resolution, and technology.

When principals assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the Peer Group Evaluation Process in fall 1996, they noted valuing several key aspects, including new relationships and interactions with other principals, support and assistance in handling difficult issues, diverse perspectives and varied expertise among colleagues, opportunities to brainstorm solutions to problems, and the meaningful form of evaluation established through learning and cooperative efforts.

For more information, contact Libia Gil, Superintendent, Chula Vista Elementary School District, 84 East J St., Chula Vista, CA 91910-6199, lgil@cvesd.k12.ca.edu.

Source: Gil, Libia S. (1998). "Principals evaluating peers: How one school district is developing leadership capacity to assume full responsibility for student growth." *The School Administrator.* October 1998.

Taking Ownership

Making changes such as those outlined above will not be easy. As communities seek solutions, they likely will encounter the same stumbling blocks that others have faced in grappling with these issues. Tough challenges confront five stakeholder groups: state and local school systems, higher education, businesses, principals, and community leaders.

State and Local School Systems: What criteria can school systems use to fairly, consistently and accurately evaluate principals, who are such an important influence on student learning? For what "results" can communities justly hold principals accountable? How can accountability take into consideration the challenges — such as students' racial, cultural and economic backgrounds, which vary so dramatically from school to school — that affect how well principals can do their jobs? Are sharp increases in assessment and accountability for principals likely to be viewed by some people, at best, as a waste of scant education dollars, and at worst, as a misdirected slap in the face of a profession that already is straining under the weight of unrealistic expectations? How can school systems determine whether such efforts are likely to improve student achievement? What resources and supports are needed? What are the relationships among accountability, authority and autonomy for principals?

Higher Education: How can higher education institutions be jolted out of the inertia that has resulted in the mediocre preparation and low entry standards of so many training programs for principals? The partnerships that exist usually are between districts and higher education programs to produce school managers, not instructional, visionary and community leaders. How can shifts in principal training be made?

Businesses: Businesses have enormous influence on the ways communities value, prioritize and support their schools. What role is the business community obligated to play in the push to demand more of schools and principals that employers have fueled during the past two decades? How can the resources and expertise of the private sector strengthen principal leadership?

Principals: How can principals develop the instructional, community and visionary leadership necessary to provide strong, effective direction for learning at the school level? What role should principal associations and other education organizations play in convening and equipping principals to confront the problems faced by the profession? How can principals leverage a willingness to work in the more structured environments engineered by new accountability measures to demand stronger support, more resources, and greater autonomy and authority than they traditionally have received from school systems?

Community Leaders: How can citizen leaders and community organizations concerned about student learning get involved and participate in the discussions? What is the role of community leaders in convening and facilitating the process? How can they bring the issues to the public's attention and explain the complexities of the challenges? What is their role in providing school support?

Everyone has a role to play. Those who seek to improve principal leadership will need to answer these and other tough questions to build a common consensus for solutions.

Promising Practices: Texas Principals Leadership Initiative

Principals in Texas know that they themselves bear responsibility for guaranteeing effective school-level leadership for student learning: Each principal and assistant principal in the state must periodically diagnose his or her learning needs. Each is required to maintain a professional growth plan with activities based on an assessment of skill strengths and developmental changes. And each is expected to participate actively in ongoing professional development.

But these school administrators are not left to fend for themselves. They also know they can count on solid support from the Texas Principals Leadership Initiative (TPLI), which advocates for and facilitates access to meaningful professional development and assessment opportunities. Created in 1995, TPLI's uniqueness stems from the inclusiveness of its board members — a diverse group of stakeholders dedicated to principal quality in Texas. TPLI assists a variety of entities in providing ongoing, seamless, reflective and collaborative professional development opportunities directly linked to school administrators' main role of facilitating high quality teaching and learning.

Perhaps the most important aspect of TPLI, though, is its emphasis on assessment. Principals and assistant principals receive an objective diagnosis of their skills in relation to the state's new standards for the principalship. The new state rules call for school administrators to base decisions about appropriate professional development on assessment results — including observed behaviors in controlled job-like situations, as well as reflective self-assessment.

TPLI has collaborated with regional service centers, colleges and universities, professional associations, school districts, and other education stakeholders to provide school administrators with ready access to high-quality professional development.

For more information, contact Bobbie Eddins, Executive Director, Texas Principals Leadership Initiative, 400 West 15th Street, Suite 305, Austin, TX 78701, (512) 310-9465, beddins@tpli.org, www.tpli.org.

Source: *Creating a Professional Pathway for the Texas Principalship.* 1999. State Board for Educator Certification, Texas.

Conclusion

If it has become commonplace or clichéd to observe that public schools are in crisis, it can only be because they struggle with so many difficulties — ensuring children's safety, providing adequate technology, stemming staff turnover, fixing dilapidated facilities and on and on — that each day, it seems, newspaper headlines declare a new crisis. But the biggest tragedy, ironically, usually gets less attention: Because schools are pulled in so many different directions, they continually fail to fulfill their core mission of educating children to high levels.

The challenges of the global economy and the opportunities offered by new technologies underscore schools' need of strong leadership for student learning. Principals today too often are not ready to meet this need. This is not so much an individual shortcoming of particular principals as a systemic failure of school systems to adapt the principalship to the changing needs of schools. State and local education systems must abandon the century-old model of the principal as a middle manager directly responsible for every aspect of school operations and performance. Instead, they must explore new arrangements of managing building operations, such as through outsourcing and team leadership strategies. New models of the principalship — and there are sure to be multiple models emerging to accommodate various schools' needs — must revolve around leadership for learning.

Reinventing the principalship in this way will not be easy. State and local school systems, higher education, businesses, and principals themselves will need to work together to fortify the professional "pipeline" to ensure that, in the coming decade, schools have the highly qualified leaders they need. Stakeholders also will need to find ways of supporting the profession, so that the principalship attracts talented leaders, gives them the tools and freedom to do their job well, and rewards them for high-grade performance. Finally, these stakeholders will need to explore effective strategies for ensuring quality and results, chiefly through unprecedented efforts in principal assessment, accountability and data collection. Only by addressing these issues can public education systems ensure that principals have the instructional, community and visionary leadership necessary to achieve significant improvements in student learning.

The work must be done at the state and local levels, where this report is designed to stimulate conversations and activities. Some communities are beginning to address these issues and develop promising practices, but there is a need for more data, information and research. The next stage of the School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative is to marshal additional resources for support, technical assistance, and guidance for state and local efforts. The following section of the report provides a collection of tools and resources to help begin this work. Please consult these materials in your work and stay in contact with the Institute for Educational Leadership for more on leadership for student learning.

Leadership in Your Own Backyard

Thank you for reading this report. There are many examples of effective school leadership nationwide. But for the most part, these examples are the exception, not the rule.

The purpose of the Institute for Educational Leadership is to inform the national discourse on school leadership through its School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative. As part of this initiative, IEL convened four diverse task forces — made up of education, government, business, civic and other organizational leaders — to identify key priorities for efforts to improve teacher, principal, school district and state-level leadership in education.

This report of IEL's Task Force on the Principalship is the first in the series of reports from these task forces. IEL believes that you will find the discussion useful in your work.

An Invitation to Lead

Leadership is a matter of guiding a community to realize its potential — to be its best. That is why this effort to strengthen school leadership must begin with a recognition that there is a new politics of education in the United States, one that increasingly is fueled and guided powerfully by the concerns of parents, community members, employers and government leaders. If the effort is to make a difference, this is the richly diverse community on which it will depend.

The IEL Task Force on Principal Leadership, which has provided direction for this report, reflects that reality by representing the many players and stakeholders who will need to collaborate to address the principal leadership crisis. IEL urges others to work in similarly collaborative ways in communities across the country to address these important issues.

Getting Started

If you are concerned about school leadership in your community, there are many starting points and numerous priorities for action. However, your fundamental challenge is to gain consensus on the problem you face and on a focused, shared vision of what needs to be done.

IEL encourages you to:

• **Do your homework.** The initial organizing activity should be gathering data to provide a focus for the discussions and a basis for identifying specific problems and issues challenging your community or school district.

• **Engage the community.** Diverse representatives from many different sectors — education, government, business, civic and political, etc. — in your community should be invited to engage in conversations about how to address the school leadership issue challenging your school district.

• **Find common ground.** Focus your early efforts on gaining consensus on a collective vision and goals for the schools in your area. These will guide the group when the issues get complicated and divisive.

• **Talk to one another.** Conduct honest, "around the kitchen table" dialogues and debates about the particular challenges, opportunities and options for action described in this report.

• **Make something happen.** Make plans to take specific actions that will work for and in your community, so that your constituents, partners, friends and neighbors are assured strong leadership in your schools.

Because many of these actions are highly political, leaders must engage another key stakeholder: the general public. Taxpayers want good schools and generally agree that this will require investments. But most people have little understanding of the importance and complexity of principal leadership. Now is the time to start building public awareness and support for action options such as those described in this report.

To provide a possible starting point for conversations in your community, IEL has developed a list of questions that will help you explore specific aspects of your leadership challenge. IEL wishes you success in your important efforts to strengthen educational leadership and improve student learning. You are encouraged to make use of the many options, approaches, illustrative examples and resources presented in this report.

Suggested Questions

Filling the Pipeline With Effective School Leaders

- Are we facing a principal shortage in our community? What data do we have to help answer this question?
- What reasons do principals give for leaving the position? What reasons do teachers and others give for not pursuing the principalship?
- Are our principal recruitment practices sufficient to meet the need for qualified and effective leaders for student learning? How do current principals support recruitment efforts?
- Do proportions of women and minorities in principal positions in our community mirror the representation of women and minorities among our student body? If not, how can we support more representative recruitment practices?
- What standards or requirements do we have in place for new principals? Do these criteria guarantee effective leaders for student learning? How rigorous are our mechanisms for credentialing principals?
- Do we actively encourage nontraditional principal candidates to pursue the position? Do we ensure effective leadership for student learning by holding those candidates to high standards and requirements the same as or similar to those applied to other candidates?
- Do principals receive high-quality preparation? Is that preparation closely tied to the daily realities and needs of real schools?
- Do we operate and support retirement systems that allow school leaders to move from place to place? Do our retention efforts ensure that high-quality principals will serve in our community?
- What can we learn from other communities like ours, who are having more success filling the pipeline with effective school administrators?

Supporting the Profession

- How strong is the professional development that our community's principals receive? Does it concentrate on important skill sets dealing with leadership for student learning, community engagement, and setting and meeting meaningful goals? Is that professional development closely linked to the actual work of the school?
- Do principals have frequent, plentiful and meaningful opportunities for peer networking, mentoring and coaching?
- How does our community nurture effective collaborations among policymakers, public education officials and other education organizations to strengthen leadership and redefine the role of the principal?

• Does our school system offer principals sufficient compensation to attract and retain the high-quality leaders for student learning that we need?

• Does our community recognize the principal as the school-level leader for student learning by assigning the principal the necessary autonomy and authority needed to guarantee success?

• How do we compare with relatively successful school systems? What can we learn from them about supporting principals?

Guaranteeing Quality and Results

• Are our community's principals evaluated on a regular, frequent basis? Do those evaluations examine school-level progress and results that paint an accurate and full picture of leadership for student learning? How do those evaluations provide principals with the information they need to grow professionally?

• Are principals held accountable for providing effective leadership for student learning? How fair are accountability measures applied to principals? Who else shares in school-level accountability? Are principals, teachers and students provided with the supports needed to meet rigorous accountability measures?

• What data do we have on our current principals and the generation that we expect will replace them when they retire? What do we know about alternative structures for school leadership, such as distributive leadership arrangements in which other school employees or community partners assume responsibility for key functions traditionally associated with the principalship? Do we have answers for our community's questions about what it will take to guarantee high-quality leadership for student learning?

Speak Up

To help IEL provide the best tools and resources possible for local and regional leadership efforts such as yours, you are invited to contact IEL with news about what is happening in your community:

- What local, regional or state actions do you plan to take to address education leadership issues in your area?
- Can you provide examples of effective programs, initiatives or organizations that might provide useful models for others around the country?
- How have this report and the accompanying tools and resources been useful to you?
- What additional tools, resources or information would help you strengthen school leadership?

IEL hopes to incorporate your input in upcoming publications and the Web site of the Institute for Educational Leadership's School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative. Please contact IEL by any of the following means:

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